

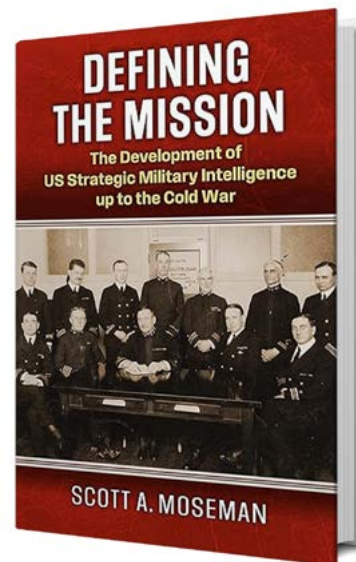
intelligence in public media

Defining the Mission

The Development of US Strategic Military Intelligence up to the Cold War

Reviewed by David Welker

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Reviewer: David Welker is CIA historian.



Every intelligence officer surely knows that the path to CIA's creation was paved by World War II's Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and many are familiar with the IC's early forebears like George Washington's Revolutionary War Culper Ring and the Civil War's Bureau of Military Information. By comparison, fewer of today's intelligence officers are likely to know much about US intelligence efforts in between. Fortunately, Scott Moseman's new volume nicely fills that gap.

Moseman's stated objective is to relate and explain the uncertain path of US strategic military intelligence organizations prior to the CIA's creation in 1947, which is largely a tale in which they had to "find their voice in the expanding American military and maturing of American society." As the author explains, this searching led to considerable uncertain organizational wandering that

had real world consequences on December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked unfettered by meaningful US intelligence warning. His observations about how and why US intelligence had reached this point and how it subsequently learned to become considerably more successful during the Cold War is an important lesson for intelligence officers navigating the uncertainty of their profession in today's world.

The story begins in 1882 with the creation of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), the nation's oldest extant intelligence organization, which is joined by the War Department's army-focused Military Intelligence Division (MID) in 1885. Throughout his volume the author charts the ups and down of these two primary military intelligence organizations, which for more than 60 years was all the nation possessed to provide what

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then passed for strategic intelligence. Through detailed examinations of their various organizational, leadership, and budgetary changes Moseman charts the path of US intelligence from the post-Civil War era through the late 19th century, during the Spanish American War, World War I, and through World War II. In each era, Moseman relates the few successes these organizations had, but he mostly shows the how and why both ONI and MID failed to do more than marginally support the nation.

The author effectively attributes these results mostly to both policymakers' outright disinterest in intelligence and, to the extent they cared, a lingering and dated view of the topic that forced ONI and MID to "fight the last war" or reject more modern ideas that didn't align with elected officials' preferred policy directions. As a result, until World War II, US military intelligence was largely relegated to mere data collection. Within both ONI and MID, uneven senior leadership only made the situation worse, with periodic progress toward becoming effective intelligence organizations repeatedly undone by leaders looking out for their own interests. For example, ONI leaders, being navy officers, particularly knew their careers would only prosper at sea, not behind a desk in Washington, and they were seemingly always scheming to leave.

Perhaps most ruinous was that too often ONI and MID leaders hurt their own organizations by chasing what seemed to be at the time attention-grabbing missions and roles that really only diverted them from becoming capable of providing strategic intelligence. Moseman shows that both had barely begun moving toward real effectiveness—creating the first foreign

military collectors that laid the foundation for today's defense attaches and preparing early analysis for military leaders—when they eagerly shifted to become chiefly domestic spy-catchers in the anti-Hun mania of World War I.

A nice touch throughout the volume is the author's treatment of how both popular culture depicted ONI and MID in books and movies, which he demonstrates too often became a pretty trap that prevented the two organizations from evolving. As Moseman shows, such chasing the "shiny object of the day" paid near-term benefits, but at the cost of paving the path to a date with destiny at Pearl Harbor.

Knowing that in many respects this is a sorry tale that is hard for today's intelligence officers to read, even as readers know the story turns in a happier direction after World War II with the creation of CIA and the modern Intelligence Community. At the same time, Moseman's story carries important warnings as today's IC grapples with the same resource and mission pressures echoing of earlier eras.

The volume's only real weakness is that, as the author admits, it was built on his doctoral dissertation and it frequently bogs down as an organizational history, in both the good and bad sense of that term. Yet for those willing to press on, Moseman's account will serve as a valuable bit of history context that will enrich today's intelligence officers. ■